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1902

Mistress Nancy

A Drama in Four Acts

By Graham Ashmead

JOHN SPENCER,
PRINTER AND BOOKBINDER,
CHESTER, PA.

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A Drama in Four Acts

BY

GRAHAM ASHMEAD

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May 3, 1922.

Dramatis Personæ

Nancy Worthington,	*The Squire's Ward.*
Martha Bunting,	*Captain Grantham's Sweetheart.*
Anna,	*Upper Servant at the Oaks.*
Laurence Barrington.	*Officer in British Army.*
Charles Grantham,	*Officer in Continental Army.*
Squire Dartmarsh,	*Nancy's Guardian.*
James Burton,	*Servant at the Oaks.*
Justice Graham.	
Ananias and Moses,	*Negro Slaves.*
Continental Soldier.	
Officer of Pennsylvania Militia.	
Militia and Continental Soldiers.	

Mistress Nancy

ACT I.

[SCENE.—*Library of "*THE OAKS,*" in Roxburghshire, Scotland.*]

BURTON. I say, Anna, I don't like it. All night long an owl hooted in the old oak planted by the master's grandfather. It's a warning of death in this family that I never knew to fail.

ANNA. If the Squire hadn't fainted after returning from the long ride yesterday, you'd never have given the hooting of an owl a thought.

BURTON. Why, Anna, you've often heard the old folks hereabouts tell how an owl hooted the night before the Squire's father was killed by his horse falling and crushing him. Mother has told me time and again how the night before the old Squire, the master's grandfather, was murdered in a duel, that no one could sleep in the house, because of the owl's call in the young oak he had planted when a child. The old oak, now, I mean.

ANNA. Don't be a fool, Burton. You give as much heed to omens and signs of bad luck as a fisherman's wife. Hush! Here comes Mistress Nancy, and you must not fill her mind with your gloomy forebodings. Your idle talk might make her exceedingly unhappy, for she dotes upon her Daddy, though there's no blood tie between them.

BURTON. Who said anything about the Squire dying? I would not utter a word to worry the sweet lass, but that there's trouble hanging over this household I can be sworn. (*Enter Nancy Worthington.*)

(*Nancy speaks as she approaches front.*)

Hasn't Dad risen yet? Anna, I was dreadfully frightened last night when he swooned. I am not entirely over the fright yet, although, Burton, you told me, nearly half an hour ago, that Daddy would join me here presently. I don't remember that I ever before sat a meal through by myself. I was so doleful and unhappy that I could scarcely break my fast.

ANNA. Don't brood upon trouble before it comes. My dear girl, it comes to us all soon enough without our running to meet it.

NANCY. But Daddy has talked to me recently about such dreadful things, about dying, and—Burton, you may retire. (*Exit Burton.*) Anna, I do not remember my mother. Try as I may, I cannot recall her to memory. I was not quite three years old when she died. I have only a faint recollection of my father, merely such an impression as would be made on the mind of a child of tender age. It seems that all my life has been lived at the Oaks with Daddy and you. The only mother I have ever known has been you, and I cling to you for sympathy and womanly love.

ANNA. Don't cry, my darling. I promise you that I will always, as best I can, stand between you and unhappiness.

NANCY. You need not tell me how you love me. You have ever been kind and tender with me. But tell me of Laurence Barrington. You know that to-day he will visit the Oaks. Talk to me about him.

Dad thinks he is splendid. I like him very much, but I particularly want to know something about him.

ANNA. Laurence will only be here for a few hours. Three days hence he will sail for Gibralter. His regiment is to relieve the 29th, under orders for India. The Squire and Laurence, you know, entertain a warmer regard for each other than is usual between uncle and nephew.

NANCY. Yes—I know. But what more can you tell me about him?

ANNA. Nothing to his discredit. By the terms of his grandfather's will, on the death of the Squire, the Oaks will pass to him absolutely.

NANCY. Yes, I know. But why?

ANNA. Laurence Barrington is the only child of the old Squire's daughter, Deborah, who died when her son was scarcely a week old. His father was with Braddock. After that disastrous attack on Fort Duquesne, he was never again heard from. The doubly orphaned child was reared by his paternal grandmother, who set a high standard for the lad in his moral training.

NANCY. She was a good woman.

ANNA. Yes. The present Squire, your Dad, but really only your guardian, had married in opposition to his father's wishes, and while the old Squire gave his son a life interest in his estate, he excluded the children born of this marriage from any share in his belongings at the death of their father. All the estate then is to go to Laurence Barrington.

NANCY. How did the horrid old man know that Laurence would be better than his own son? Why there never was anyone better, kinder, or more honorable than Dad.

ANNA. Well, the prejudiced old man need not have carried his anger to that extent, for the delicate young wife was so shocked by the intelligence of the old Squire's sudden death, that the same day, she died childless. He and the woman he hated, yet never knew, were buried at the same hour in the family vault. The young Squire never married again. Your father and the Squire were inseparable friends, and at his death you became the Squire's ward. Your guardian brought you to the Oaks, a little tot. He loves you, Nancy. Had you been his own child he could not love you more.

NANCY. Yes, yes. Every wish of mine, even the most trivial, he gratifies. But I have 20,000 pounds of my own. That would give me the pretty things I crave.

ANNA. Do you think that thought guides the Squire in gratifying your whims?

NANCY. No, that was just horrid in me. Anna, I do love Dad as affectionately as any daughter could love her father. I would do anything that would give him pleasure. (*Goes close to Anna.*) Anna, he spoke to me the other day of Laurence Barrington, and—and—well, he said the most cherished wish of his heart was that I should become Laurence Barrington's wife.

ANNA. You are only fourteen. There is time enough for you, darling, to marry four years hence.

NANCY. I don't want to be married—I mean not yet. But Dad seems to have set his heart upon it. I told him if it would gratify him I would consent. He kissed me and seemed so happy then.

ANNA. He believes Laurence to be an honorable gentleman, and the marriage would, I know, please him.

NANCY. Anna, you don't think Dad will expect me to get married

to-day. Here in Scotland the publication of the bans are not essential. If Dad pressed me to be married at once, and Laurence and I were married, the ceremony would be legal.

ANNA. Why, what a wise little woman you are.

NANCY. I love Laurence. I mean I like him; but he doesn't care for me. Then I think I don't love him as a husband should be loved by his wife.

ANNA. Have no fear. There will be no haste in this matter. If my darling does become Laurence Barrington's wife, she will be a woman to be envied. He is a manly, truthful young fellow, that can be relied upon to make any woman happy and proud of her husband.

NANCY. But I do wish that Daddy had not spoken of this marriage just yet.

(*Squire Dartmarsh, without.*) Burton, tell Mistress Nancy I would be pleased if she will come to me at once in the library. (*Enters.*) Why, here you are, Nancy!

NANCY. Burton told me an hour ago you wished to see me, and I have waited for you.

SQUIRE. Anna, will you see that everything has been done to make Laurence's brief stay pleasant? The stage is late, and he will have only a few hours with us at the best. Nancy and I have some business matters to discuss. My ward's a woman grown now, and I must take her into consultation when arranging affairs in which she is an interested party.

NANCY. Whatever you do will be for the best. I will be with you in a little while, Anna. Dad and I will not be long settling this business. (*Exit Anna.*)

SQUIRE. Nancy, come and sit on the arm of this chair. As a little girl you used to climb here and fall asleep with your head on my breast.

(*Nancy seats herself on arm of chair.*) Yes, Dad. You'd sit with your arms about me for hours without moving, that my slumbers might not be disturbed.

SQUIRE. I want you to listen attentively, child. What I have to say is of vast moment, at least to me.

NANCY. Tell me, Dad. What is of moment to you must be the like to me.

SQUIRE. Since my poor wife died, all the sunshine that has entered my life you brought into this dreary old house, when, as a little tot, your father intrusted you to my care.

NANCY. I am so glad you've said that, Daddy (*embraces and kisses him*). No daughter could love you more than I do.

SQUIRE. As years count, I am not an old man, but I have never wholly shaken off the sorrows of my early manhood. The doctor tells me—

NANCY. He is mistaken. He don't know. If anything should happen to you, Dad, what would become of me?

SQUIRE. It is for that very reason, Nancy, that I am anxious to see your future position assured beyond all accidents of chance. If that were done, a weight of which the doctor is ignorant, would be removed from my heart.

NANCY. Would it make you happy, Daddy, if I were Laurence Barrington's wife?

SQUIRE. Assuredly it would. I have watched the boy who will succeed me as master of the Oaks from his infancy, and I know that I could not give you into the protection of a nobler or better man.

NANCY. I am only fourteen. Laurence is twenty-one. I prom-

ise you, Daddy, I will become his wife when I am sixteen, if he wants me.

SQUIRE. Then, my darling, I shall never see you married.

NANCY. Don't say that, Daddy, you frighten me. I could love Laurence. I have heard him spoken of only in terms of praise as long as I can remember. But he looks upon me as simply a child, and (*dropping her head on his shoulder*) you and Anna have always loved me so dearly that I want my husband to love me too. It would break my heart if he did not.

SQUIRE. Laurence will love you, my pet. All love you who know you. He will be here directly. For some reason the stage has been delayed. That will shorten his stay, for he must catch the evening coach to rejoin his regiment in time to sail with the command.

NANCY. Yes, I know. But—but he may not want to marry me, a child only, in his eyes.

SQUIRE. Laurence will be absent three years. When he returns you will be seventeen, a very proper age for girls to marry. I had hoped that when he left us for a long absence that the two persons in the world I love best would be man and wife. The duties that come with that relationship would not be yours for fully three years.

NANCY. Daddy, I will be married to Laurence to-day, if he wants me.

SQUIRE. I will not consent to the marriage if you enter into wedlock merely because it will please me, your guardian.

NANCY. I have always regarded Laurence as my husband when I came to be a grown-up woman. But he has never spoken to me of love, and I—well—Daddy, girls like to be told that, you know, by—

BURTON. (*Entering.*) Mr. Laurence Barrington has come, and will be here presently.

NANCY. Oh! I'll not stay now. I will join you in a little while.

SQUIRE. Yes, Nancy, remove the marks of tears from your cheeks. Besides, I want a few minutes private conversation with Laurence without interruption.

NANCY. If Laurence wants to marry me, he'll ask me, won't he? It's an awful thing for a girl to just be thrown into a man's arms. I didn't mean to say that, Dad. Kiss me and tell me you love your wayward ward.

SQUIRE. (*Kissing her.*) I love you so well, Nancy, that nothing in this world could induce me knowingly to imperil the life's happiness of my little girl. Run away now. I will send for you shortly. (*Exit Nancy.*)

SQUIRE. If Laurence will acquiesce in my desire, Nancy will be protected and provided for, and her happiness assured in the event of my death. (*Enter Laurence, who stops and gazes at Squire.*) The doctors were brutally honest in their opinion that my life hung by a thread so attenuated that the slightest undue excitement might prove fatal. Yet it is best that I should know the worst.

LAURENCE. (*Advancing.*) My dear uncle, an accident to the stage coach and the wretched roads have robbed me of three hours of my allotted time with you, much to my regret.

SQUIRE. (*Taking both of Laurence's hands in his.*) You cannot know how glad I am to see you, Laurence. You received and carefully read my letter. Have you given due heed to its contents? Pardon me for being so precipitate in this matter.

LAURENCE. Yes. I am here to carry out your wishes. You do yourself injustice in that letter where you speak of your criminal neglect in the investment of Nancy's money. Many of the schrewdest business

men of London sought eagerly for the same securities, holding them as not only safe, but exceedingly desirable.

SQUIRE. That is true, but it does not relieve me of self condemnation. I feel, Laurence, that it is hardly likely that I shall ever see you again in this world. The doctors give me but little hope, and—

LAURENCE. The best medical skill must be called into consultation, uncle.

SQUIRE. I have already visited London twice, and on both occasions the most eminent specialists came to the like conclusion. My dear Laurence, I have the utmost confidence in you, and I cannot show that trust more fully than in placing the whole future happiness of my ward, Nancy Worthington, in your keeping.

LAURENCE. I have hardly reached legal manhood, and—

SQUIRE. She is an affectionate, innocent, pure girl, Laurence. I am sure she loves you, although she is not conscious of that sentiment. I assume that you reciprocate that affection; I am sure you will when you come to know her worth.

LAURENCE. Why, I have already learned to look upon Nancy as my wife that is to be; I have always thought of her in that character. I am nowise entangled with any other woman, nor do I care for any in the like way I do for Nancy.

SQUIRE. If I should die now, I repeat what I wrote in my letter so that you will not misapprehend my meaning, the world will regard me as a dishonest man. (*Laurence makes gesture of dissent.*) I am not that, Laurence. The worst is that I did not exercise the best judgment in the supervision of Nancy's estate, but intentionally, I have never wronged her, nor, I believe, any human being. If Nancy were your wife, the public would never know of my shortcomings. Nothing associated with my death causes me any apprehension, save that men may hold me as a dishonorable man.

LAURENCE. While you were guarded in your expressions in that letter, I learned enough to know that Nancy and my marriage was the closest wish of your heart. I am here to protect your honor and do your wish.

SQUIRE. God bless you, my boy. As I shall have to answer hereafter for what I now say, I believe that that marriage will secure to both of you abundant happiness. I have explained fully in my letter to you why it will bring unspeakable joy to me. I need not refer further to this subject. I will send Nancy to you. She will expect to meet me here. (*Exit.*)

LAURENCE. Were I not to be absent for so long a period, I would hesitate to carry out uncle's wishes in this matter. Nancy may not comprehend fully the seriousness of the act that is contemplated. Our separation may probably strengthen the bond that will unite Nancy and me. Certain it is, when we meet again we shall be of an age that will excite no unfavorable criticism. At least, none on the score of age.

NANCY. (*Entering.*) Well, Daddy, I have come. Why, Laurence, I am so glad to see you. But I thought Daddy was here. He sent for me. (*Laurence puts his arm about her.*) I did not expect (*he kisses her*) you'd do that.

LAURENCE. (*Still holds her hand.*) Yes, uncle was here a moment ago. Nancy, you know I am ordered away for three long years. Uncle loves you and me better than all else, and he longs for our marriage with all his heart.

NANCY. (*Bashfully.*) But I am only a child yet, and you don't—

LAURENCE. Love you? Where is your womanly intuition? Yes,

I do. If I did not, I would not be here now ready to make you my wife, that is, of course, if you will consent to this marriage.

NANCY. You love me, Laurence? Are you sure you are not saying that merely because Daddy has urged upon you this marriage?

LAURENCE. No, Nancy. While it is true it is uncle's wish, I am here, darling, of my own desire, to marry you, if you are willing to be my wife. I do love you, will always love you, and so far as in me lies, I shall strive to make life a happy one.

NANCY. If anything should happen Dad, I haven't a soul in the wide world, except Anna, to care for me. All my life I have been accustomed to be loved, to be made much of, and if I were neglected or deceived, it would kill me.

LAURENCE. Even if I did not love you now, Nancy, I would learn to love you. Don't you believe me?

NANCY. I don't know. Can anyone learn to love a person as an act of duty?

LAURENCE. No. Love is beyond human will to tender or withhold. If you do not love and trust me, Nancy, it would be a wrong to yourself to marry me, even if your refusal should bring unhappiness to your guardian.

NANCY. Laurence, I told Daddy if you asked me to marry you, I would consent. I believe had you gone away without asking me, that I would have been dreadfully unhappy.

LAURENCE. May God make me worthy of you. I trust that you will never regret that avowel, my little wife. I will have the right to call you that, presently.

SQUIRE. (*Speaks as he advances.*) By a fortunate chance, Rev. Mr. Hamilton has just called, and—

LAURENCE. Why cannot the clergyman marry us at once? Uncle, Nancy has consented to be my wife. What do you say, darling? Shall it be now? It is your right to decide.

NANCY. If you and Daddy wish it, I—well, I consent.

BURTON. (*Entering.*) A lad has just reached here with a message from Colonel Lincoln, who is in the village on his way to Bristol. The roads are so washed and heavy from the storm of yesterday and the stage coaches so delayed, Colonel Lincoln says, that unless Mr. Barrington will accept a seat in his carriage, it will be impossible for him to join the regiment before the transport will have sailed. The Colonel will leave in about an hour.

SQUIRE. I will attend to the reply to this message. Burton, remain here. Those articles and papers must go with Mr. Barrington's luggage. See you to their packing. Children, come with me. We must expedite what we have in hand. (*Exit Squire, Nancy and Laurence.*)

BURTON. (*While packing portmanteau.*) I would like to have been present at the ceremony. What a grand couple those two will make. Laurence is an honest, courageous, manly lad, and Nancy is a charming little lass, who will soon bloom into a beautiful woman. I wish them all the good luck Heaven can send to them. (*Enter Squire, Anna, Laurence and Nancy.*)

SQUIRE. Let me, Nancy, be the first to call you Madam Barrington.

NANCY. (*Putting her hands on his shoulders.*) But Daddy, I'm your little Nancy still, even if I am now a married woman.

ANNA. You will always be the Squire's and my little Nancy.

LAURENCE. You will all have her with you for three long years—

I am the only one who will be shut out from the sunshine of her presence during that period.

NANCY. It will be harder for me, who can only wait the passage of time. You will have so much to do, while I—Laurence you will write to me at every opportunity? (*He nods.*) I dare tell you now that I have loved you all my life, even as a child, and my only fear has been that you would not reciprocate that love. You do reciprocate it, my husband, tell me you do! (*Barrington pets her and whispers to her, while Burton carries out portmanteau.*)

SQUIRE. (*Interrupting.*) I regret that you must separate. But, Laurence, the chair is already at the door, and you must hasten now. The swollen streams and heavy roads have robbed us of much of the time that you were to be with us. (*Laurence and Nancy exit at side door.*) Anna, now that they are man and wife, I feel almost young again. May God's richest blessings be showered upon them.

ANNA. Amen, with all my heart. (*Laurence and Nancy enter.*)

LAURENCE. (*With his arm around Nancy.*) Cheer up, my little wife. Probably uncle will bring you to see me during the coming spring. You will come? (*Nancy nods consent.*) Good-bye, Anna; good-bye, uncle. I promise you that I will love, shield, and protect your little girl, no matter what the future may hold in store for us. Nancy, my wife, kiss me farewell. I must hasten now. (*Takes her in his arms, and leads her to chair.*) Good-bye all. Stay where you are. Let me remember you in this room, where I trust to meet you all on my return. (*Exit.*) (*Squire leans over Nancy and pats her hand.*)

ANNA. (*Looking out of window.*) He's gone. They must need drive rapidly to reach the village in the time set by Colonel Lincoln.

SQUIRE. All has happened as I ardently desired. At some future time, my little girl, you will bless your old Dad's memory for this day and the happiness it has made possible for you.

NANCY. Daddy, I bless you now. It was through your insistance that I am Laurence Barrington's wife.

SQUIRE. Why, I believe Laurence has left his cloak. We cannot forward it to him in time to catch the transport. Oh, well, we can send it later. (*Picks up cloak. Letter falls out. Burton enters.*) Nancy, to you I commit the custody of your husband's apparel, your first care as a wife.

BURTON. (*Picking up letter.*) This fell from the cloak, sir, as you picked it up. (*Hands letter to Squire.*)

SQUIRE. It is unsealed. It may be a matter of great moment. If so, we must forward it to Laurence by special post riders. (*Opens letter, starts back in alarm.*) God help me! what is this? (*Drops letter, puts hand over heart, and staggers into chair.*)

BURTON. (*Alarmed.*) What is the matter, Squire? (*Bends over him.*) Quick! the doctor. This is something serious.

NANCY. (*Dropping on knees in front of Squire.*) Daddy! Daddy! speak to me. What is the matter? (*Takes his hand, which falls from her grasp. Places her hand on his heart.*) Dead! Dead! What has caused this? What can have shocked him so? (*Rises, picks up letter.*) This may explain. (*Reads.*) I could forgive this man his wrong to me. But I cannot, I will not forgive the wrong that has broken the heart of his doting uncle and slain him. All of you listen. I am not Laurence Barrington's wife. This letter proclaims his infamy. He held me to his breast and whispered lies. He went unblushing through the ceremony of marriage with me, while a devoted wife in this (*points to letter*) pours forth her love for him, and joy-

fully announces the birth to him of a son and heir. (*Drops on her knees.*) Thank God, Daddy, the blow that struck you down was instantaneous. You, the soul of honor, are better as you are than to live to know the perfidy of this creature, whom, you, one and all, proclaimed as the very embodiment of every manly virtue. Fate has been more kind to you than to me. I live—Daddy, why cannot I join you; you who never deceived me, but whose joy was in my happiness. (*Sobs.*)

ANNA. Darling, is the letter addressed to Laurence? Does it mention his name? May there not be some mistake?

NANCY. (*Rising to her feet.*) That is his cloak. This letter is written by the wife he has wronged to the husband whose loyalty she does not question. There can be no mistake. I am not his wife. So soon as the funeral of Daddy is ended, I will leave this house, never again to enter its walls. I will tear Laurence Barrington's image from my heart. This moment of agony has destroyed my girlhood, leaving me a woman with all a woman s anguish and despair. God help me! for I love—I cannot help loving Laurence Barrington with all my heart. (*Faints, as curtain falls.*)

ACT II.

[SCENE.—*Apartment in Military Hospital, Chester, Pennsylvania. A couch in rear of stage. Colonial furniture. Ananias and Moses adjusting the room.*]

ANANIAS. You was skeered to deaf. Dat was de trouble wif you. Who eber heerd ob a ghost at de Friends' Burial Ground? Dat's only you'se 'magination. You'se just done and gib you'self away bad.

MOSES. Now, uncle Ananias, I seed dat thin' myself. Nobody done and tol' me. I was comin' down de Edgmont road, 'bout midnight. I had been to tell Dr. Brown he was wanted 'mediately for old massa war powerful low, when right ober de fence ob de graveyard, I saw—

ANANIAS. Yes'um! yes'um! Go on, what fo you stop talkin fo'?

MOSES. You done and 'rupted me wid your "yes'um."

ANANIAS. Go right 'long with your fairy story. Don't you want me to listen to you, Moses? I didn't 'tend to 'rupt you.

MOSES. De moon was settin' in de west, and you could jes make out de top ob de fence, as clar as day.

ANANIAS. You don' say dat?

MOSES. Dat's what I is a sayin'. I seed two great wings a flappin' an' a flappin' and I heerd dat thing say "Ghu-haw! ghu-haw!" I made dead sure it war de imp ob de debil. Sometnin' done got right into my frought and choked me. I started and run, my heart a beatin' tell you could hab heerd de thumps jes like hammers ob a fullin' mill. I ain't tellin' you'se what somebody done tol' me, but what I see with my two eyes and hearn with my two years. What are you'se laughin' at, anyhow? You ignorant ole nigger.

ANANIAS. You'se fool. You don't know de bray of a mule from de song of a debil.

MOSES. Don't you bleve in ghosts, nohow?

ANANIAS. Yes. In 'spectable ghosts, in course I does. But you can't fool you'se ole uncle wid no worn out army mule, what jest got strayed at night into the Quaker graveyard. Now dere's de ghost ob

de murdered girl under de archway ob de granary. Dat's all right. She 'pears at times, no doubt 'bout dat. I wouldn't go dar fo a hatfull ob gold half-Johnies, when dar's a thunder storm comin' up. Ole Colonal Hannum knowed what he was 'bout when he stored in dat cellar de kegs of powder fo' de Congress soldiers. Dar ain't many folks would go dar on a dark night nohow, and mighty few don't keer much 'bout goin' thar by demselves in de daylight. I'd heap rather take a hiding dan go dere alone in broad daylight. (*Enter Anna.*)

ANNA. Boys, that is enough of your foolish ghost stories. What was the cause of the musketry firing we heard an hour or so ago?

ANANIAS. Don't know 'zactly, but I heerd dat de militia and some ob de King's troops had a brush on the Queen's highway, jes dis side ob de White Horse. De redcoats war takin' in some fodder and feed dey had confisticated on de Tinicum meadows, when the militia 'tacked dem, killin' free or four, and woundin' some ob de officers 'fore dey, de Britishers, got away. Heerd dat tole to Justice Graham at de Court House, and de wounded, I heerd Captain Davis say, was to be fetched to dis hospital fo' 'tention.

ANNA. Did you hear who the wounded were?

MOSES. No, misses. I done jes heerd dat all de dead and wounded war de King's troops. De militia kin' of 'sprised dem, and gave 'em dere medicine, 'fore dey knew 'zactly whar dey war at.

BURTON. (*Enters and recognizes Anna, whom he addresses.*) You here? I would have known you, Anna, although you have changed since I saw you last on the day the old Squire was buried; the afternoon when you and Mistress Nancy Barrington ran away.

ANNA. Ananias and Moses, go to the Court House and learn whether any of the wounded will be brought here. (*They exit.*) I did not wish to speak before those negroes. How dare you insult my Mistress Nancy Laurence by calling her by that name. Remember she is known here as Mistress Nancy Laurence. Since that mock marriage she has not used her own nor the name of the man who did her and her doting old Dad such dreadful wrong.

BURTON. She has appropriated his Christian name, however. But whatever wrong was done at that time was not of Captain Barrington's doing. There was no mock marriage. It was a legal, binding ceremony. Captain Barrington and Nancy Barrington are man and wife, if ever a religious ceremony made two persons such.

ANNA. That cannot be. No man can legally marry a woman, who had a wife living at that time. When Laurence Barrington went through the ceremony of marrying Nancy, he was already a married man, with a wife and child then living.

BURTON. He was not. In the hurry of coming to the Oaks, he unwittingly exchanged his cloak for that of Lieutenant Haversham, and the letter you all read was written by Madam Haversham to her husband. I believed that there was some error; you then believed that also. When the news reached Captain Barrington at Gibraltar that his uncle was dead, as he was known to be the heir, he was given leave, and went to the Oaks to find that his wife, believing the worst, had abandoned his home, without seeking an explanation. That marriage was his ruin.

ANNA. His ruin? How about the girl? It is harder by far for her.

BURTON. He has never in my presence had an unkind word to say of Nancy. That is a subject of which he never speaks. In your hurried departure, you left behind you a miniature which the Squire had had painted of his ward and hung in his room.

ANNA. Yes, we forgot it until we had gone too far to return.

BURTON. Out of the ruin of his estate, that miniature is one of the few things Laurence has saved, and he has carried it with him wherever he has gone. He loved that girl when he married her. I believe he still loves her.

ANNA. How do you know this? ....

BURTON. I went to him after you left. I followed him to the Colonies after his exchange into the Grenadiers. He has been two years in America on active service.

ANNA. Nancy and I have been in Chester nearly four years.

BURTON. Laurence is now poor. He has had little but his pay to live upon, but now he has sold his commission, and in a few days, when the sale is approved, will cease to be in the King's service. He and I also will locate in the Colonies permanently.

ANNA. Where is he now?

BURTON. He was wounded in that miserable skirmish to-day, a few miles east of Chester. He is being brought here, to this Rebel hospital, for treatment. The surgeon, one of your local doctors, ordered me to ride ahead and see that everything is made ready for his reception.

ANNA. (*Anxiously.*) Is he seriously hurt?

BURTON. No, but he is depressed and indifferent. That, I fear, may militate somewhat against his speedy recovery.

ANNA. Does he know that Nancy is here?

BURTON. No. Her lawyers in London—they were his also—assured him she was not in the British Isles. He does not imagine, I believe, that she came to America. You know, Anna, that the money in her guardian's hands has been paid to the last penny.

ANNA. I know she has abundant means. Nancy has devoted her life since the war began to charitable work in this hospital. Burton, she must not know that Laurence Barrington is here. His very name must be concealed. If she was told that he was wounded and in this hospital, I fear it might kill her. She loves him, for I hear her sometimes in her sleep muttering his name accompanied with terms of endearment.

BURTON. Have her lawyers never told her anything of her husband or his affairs?

ANNA. She forbade them to do so. That dreadful mistake has never been explained to her. She believes herself legally an unmarried woman, although she is united by love to the man she wedded.

BURTON. You must tell her all. She might in ignorance marry again. She who is the legal wife of Laurence Barrington.

ANNA. No fear of that. Many suitors have sought to win her, but she repels all advances, kindly but firmly.

BURTON. This condition cannot remain. If she loves her husband, as I know he loves her, they must be brought together. There is no justification for their being apart.

ANNA. Time will solve this strange complication. I believe if the facts were told her abruptly it might do her serious harm. Dr. Wadford, of London, cautioned me to be careful to avoid a shock. The death of her Daddy and her own marriage are so associated that we must act most advisedly. She does not even talk with me now of these bitter memories.

BURTON. I searched for the marriage certificate at the Oaks, thinking she might have thrown it aside. We failed to find it. Doubtless it was destroyed.

ANNA. It was not. Nancy carries it concealed in the bosom of

her gown. She will not confide it even into my keeping. Hush, she is coming. I know her step. Do not make yourself known. Act as if she were a stranger to you. It is for the best. (*Enter Nancy.*)

NANCY. Have you learned anything, Anna, of the musketry firing an hour or so ago? (*To Burton.*) Pardon me, but your face is very familiar. You resemble one James Burton, whom I remember at the Oaks in Roxburghshire. Have you ever been there?

ANNA. (*Crosses to Burton and whispers.*) Deny your identity. Lie if you must!

BURTON. Roxburghshire! That is in Scotland, just beyond the Cheviot Hills. You may confuse, Madam, me with a relative. There are Burtons on the borders, I think.

NANCY. Strange! Your voice and face recall to me sad memories. You are sure you have never been at the Oaks?

BURTON. Sure, Madam.

NANCY. (*Aside.*) I am mistaken. A trick of memory merely. (*To Burton.*) You are connected with the English army in some way? Have you ever heard of Mr. Laurence Barrington, a lieutenant in the 37th foot?

BURTON. There is at present no person of that name holding a commission in that regiment. I am with Captain Laurence of the Grenadiers, 27th of the line. He was wounded this morning in a skirmish near the White Horse Tavern, and is now being brought here.

NANCY. Laurence! Why, that is my name. Is he seriously injured?

BURTON. No, but he is an unlucky gentleman, who, I fear, puts but slight value on his life, and will make but an indifferent struggle for that life. He is wholly alone in the world.

NANCY. Poor fellow! It is sad when the future gives forth no hope to man or woman. Death is preferable to life in such a state. (*Aside.*) God help me! I have voiced the desire of my own heart. (*To Anna.*) Anna, show to this person the apartment which we can place at the use of Captain Laurence. Such as we have, they are at the disposal of King's man or Continental alike, when they enter within these walls. (*Exit Anna and Burton.*)

NANCY. I am strangely moved. The sight of that man has opened all my heart wounds afresh. The coincidents are so unusual. The wounded man's name is Laurence—the name I chose and have used for nearly five years. The similarity in name and appearance of the man who was here a moment ago to the Burton of my childhood is more than singular. I know not why, but I feel that a crisis is approaching that may change my life wholly, or may bring to me the restfulness of death. How childish it is in me to give way to such absurd imaginings. It is merely the suggestion that has followed the partial lifting of the curtain which shuts in my unhappy past. (*Knock.*) Come in— (*Enters Captain Grantham.*)

GRANTHAM. Mistress Laurence, I trust I do not intrude. I saw you pass by the window, and I want to tell you something. May I?

NANCY. Certainly. I am glad you are recovering from your illness. A little exercise in the open will benefit you, I think.

GRANTHAM. Mistress Nancy—I may call you that, may I not? You have been so kind to me that you will not think I am presumptuous?

NANCY. Certainly not. You may call me Nancy even. But might not Martha Bunting object to the familiarity in your address to me?

GRANTHAM. She will never notice it. She simply despises me. She can't help it, for she must know I am a coward.

NANCY. You a coward? A man who has twice been promoted for deeds of valor on the battlefield, whose name has twice appeared in the general orders issued by his Excellency, the Commander in Chief. You are a brave man, Captain Grantham, not a coward.

GRANTHAM. But I am. Most every man I know can muster courage enough to speak to a woman. You are the only woman I can talk to without stammering. You are so good and kind, I could tell you anything.

NANCY. You speak from partiality and a measure of flattery combined. Surely, Captain, you are not afraid of Martha Bunting. You saved her life when the planks of the bridge broke with the tread of her horse and hurled her into Chester creek. When the same mare threw her and dragged her by her habit, you again saved her life, for had you not risked your own by springing before the frightened animal and arresting its flight, Martha Bunting would not be alive to-day.

GRANTHAM. That was nothing to do for her. I—I like Martha Bunting, but when she thanked me, I felt so foolish that I wished the earth would open and swallow me. She couldn't help but despise me.

NANCY. You err there, Captain. She admires you and is proud that your manhood and personal courage were displayed in her behalf. Captain Grantham, why don't you seek her society? A woman who admires a man is always flattered by his attention.

GRANTHAM. She could not admire me. Pardon me, I don't doubt your word. But don't you know I often wonder how you can tolerate me. I don't know anything of the conventionalities of polite society. My old aunt who brought me up and lived with me ever since my parents died is blind, and then she loves me too well to recognize my failings. I overheard some of the French officers at Valley Forge last winter jesting at my lack of polish. I had picked up enough French to catch the substance of their remarks.

NANCY. I do not propose to betray a woman's confidence, but I tell you, Captain Grantham, as a man I respect, that any attention you might offer to Martha Bunting would not be resented by her. Don't be displeased with me, but you are in love with her. I am sure she loves you. Don't throw away your life's happiness. God help the man or woman who does that.

GRANTHAM. Your life has not been a happy one. I did not suspect that until this moment. I do not ask your confidence, but remember that whenever Charles Grantham can be of service to you, he will only be too glad to aid you, as you may need his aid. You are a good, noble woman, Mistress Nancy Laurence, and I trust you absolutely.

NANCY. You are exceedingly kind, Captain Grantham. Martha Bunting, I think, may well be proud of the man whose heart she has won.

GRANTHAM. Don't tell her that I am in love with her. Please don't tell her that. You are mistaken; she does not care for me save as a friend.

NANCY. I certainly will not speak to her of your love. You'll tell her the old sweet story yourself some of these days, never fear.

(*Door opens and Captain Barrington is carried in and laid on a lounge by militia.*)

OFFICER OF MILITIA. Mistress Laurence, this man's wounds have been dressed temporarily. Dr. Worrall will be here presently. The surgeons think it would be best not to disturb the patient immediately. He is weak from loss of blood, but otherwise his condition is not dangerous. We leave him in your care, and in that he is fortunate.

NANCY. We will observe the doctor's orders. (*Exit militia.*) I will remove the covering from his head. It is not needed now to shield him from the sun (*throws off covering—staggers back and is caught by Grantham*). What should I do? He must not recognize me. (*Pauses as if in thought.*) I cannot run away now, as I once did. He needs careful nursing. That he shall have until he is so nearly restored to health that I can pass out of his life again as I did once before. I will, I must be strong and brave. He shall never suspect who I am—I must caution Anna. She must, if necessary, deny her identity and mine. (*Starts.*) Oh, Captain Grantham!

GRANTHAM. (*Approaches and speaks in whisper.*) Mistress Nancy Laurence, between this man and you there is some bond of which I am ignorant; and on which I do not seek enlightenment, but I know you as a good, pure woman, beyond reproach. I promise you that I will minister to this man, who to me is a stranger. You have ever been a true friend, and I will be a friend to you and yours for your sake.

NANCY. I cannot in words thank you for what you have said. You, Captain Grantham, make no empty promises. I will dare to tell you that which no person save Anna and myself knows. (*Points.*) That man is my husband, or I—I thought he was my husband. I ran away from his home, but his name and my honor are unsullied by any act of mine. You know my secret—I will tell it to you more in detail later. Say nothing of what you saw or what I have told you. You but a short time ago said you trusted me absolutely. I in return trust you absolutely.

GRANTHAM. Until you give me leave to break my silence, my lips are sealed. I will leave you to consider what course of action you will adopt. You must determine that for yourself. Later, when you are more composed, I will be glad to know how I can best serve you.

NANCY. I will tell you of my unhappy life, without reserve. I cannot do that until I have your promise that this man, no matter what his crime may be, shall not be punished through any instrumentality of mine or for anything in which I may seem to be the injured party.

GRANTHAM. I promise and accept your conditions. I came to you to-day hopeless and sick at heart. You lifted me out of my despondency. I will do all in my power to lighten the burden that Fate has cast upon you. I will see you again this evening, when you may tell me as much or as little of your past as you deem best. It will do you good, little woman, to discuss your troubles with a friend. Possibly it may assist in unravelling much that now appears hopelessly tangled. (*Aside.*) God help her! Whatever may be the secret, it cannot be anything that is disreputable. (*Exit.*)

NANCY. Nearly five years have passed since Laurence Barrington and the woman whose life he made a hell stand face to face once more. I was a child then. Now I am a woman, tried by wrongs such as rarely enter into lives of women. Once I thought I could have done that man to death, for there was murder in my heart. I do not know what is the matter with me now, but I long to pillow his head upon my breast, as a mother soothes her tired child to rest. I have boasted of my strength of will, but I cannot longer deceive myself. God help me! only love for him finds place in my heart.

LAURENCE. (*Attempts to rise, falls back, speaks with difficulty.*) Who are you? I do not hear what you say, but your voice seems like one speaking to me out of the past. Like one that I loved so to hear. Is this the creation of my physical weakness? You can tell where I am. I know I was wounded, but can remember nothing after that.

NANCY. (*Approaching the couch.*) You are in the Pennsylvania Military Hospital, at Chester. You must remain quiet. The doctor prescribes perfect rest for you. You will obey his order?

LAURENCE. Yes, since you ask it. Haven't I met you before? Of course the question is absurd. Yet I feel that somewhere we have met before to-day. If this be a mere phantom of memory, it is so sweet that one could wish to pass into the unknown world under the influence of such a dream. If it is real—(*attempts again to rise.*)

NANCY. Do not move. (*Places her hand on his head.*) I am no part of any dream of your past. I am a nurse in this hospital, and I want to do all that I can to make you well and strong again. You must sleep now.

LAURENCE. (*Slowly.*) Don't remove your hand. Its presence seems to soothe and comfort me. I have not seen your face yet, but I know—I know—(*falls asleep.*)

NANCY. (*Leaning over him.*) He sleeps peacefully as a guiltless child. He is exhausted now (*feels his pulse*). He must not be disturbed. He must regain strength. I must be composed and prepared to meet what is before me.

(*Enter Anna...Nancy, looking at her, raises her hand for silence, then places her finger on her lips to emphasize her meaning. Anna, who in dumb show lets it be known that she recognizes Laurence, stands near foot of couch. Nancy falls on her knees in attitude of prayer beside the couch. Curtain slowly descends.*)

ACT III.—A MONTH LATER.

[*Same scene as in last act. Captain Laurence and Martha Bunting discovered.*]

LAURENCE. I am unable, in words, to give expression to the obligations you have placed me under during my convalescence, Mistress Bunting.

MARTHA. Yet I have done so little. Captain Grantham and Nancy Laurence—odd is it not that her name and yours are alike?—have been unremitting in their attentions to you. When your recovery was doubtful—for you made no fight for your life—Nancy, for four days never left your bedside. She could not have been more devoted to you had you been her husband. To her unselfish ministrations is largely due your restoration to health. You owe her much that you can never repay her.

LAURENCE. I know. I shall never be able to show her how greatly I appreciate her womanly kindness to me, a comparative stranger to her.

MARTHA. Captain Grantham was also constant in his attention to you, but not in the like way that Nancy was.

LAURENCE. Grantham is a splendid fellow. I cannot recognize his unselfish acts better than in extending my congratulations to you, Mistress Bunting.

MARTHA. What have I to do with him?

LAURENCE. Is not a woman who has won the love of such a man to be congratulated?

MARTHA. Captain Laurence, you are mistaken. Don't misunderstand me. To Captain Grantham I am under the greatest obligations. Twice he saved my life, but I am nothing to him. Haven't you noticed that he avoids me?

LAURENCE. Certainly he does not obtrude himself upon you. Yet where you are, there he is also. I shall be plain with you. You two—who have been so good to me—stand unwittingly, I think, in the way of your own happiness. Grantham loves you with all the fervor with which a noble, strong man regards the woman to whom he has given his heart.

MARTHA. I will be plain also. I do not shrink from acknowledging to you that I would esteem myself peculiarly fortunate if what you have said were true. I ought not, maybe, to have told you that, Captain, but as I have said that much, I will expect that you shall hold my confidence inviolate. Under no circumstances will you intimate to Captain Grantham what I have just told you.

LAURENCE. I am a gentleman. To you, I need offer no further pledge. Captain Grantham is a brave man, who can be relied upon to do heroic deeds, and yet he is exceedingly timid in the presence of women, certainly when with the one woman who is all the world to him.

MARTHA. If I am that woman, why should he be timid in my presence?

LAURENCE. You are reputed wealthy. You have proclaimed—I myself have heard you—your abhorance of male fortune hunters. In that you have created a barrier between Captain Grantham and yourself, for he imagines it had reference to him. You, like most women, desire to be loved for yourself and not for the estate you represent. I believe you to be in love with Grantham. (*Martha raises her hand with gesture of disbelief.*) At all events he loves you. A woman can always smooth the way under such circumstances to a proper understanding with the man she fancies.

MARTHA. You certainly do not lack plainness in speech, Captain Laurence. But (*anxiously*) I do esteem Captain Grantham as highly as a woman can esteem a man who is merely a valued friend.

LAURENCE. You more than esteem him. I do not urge you to forget your womanhood, but surely your tact can find an opportunity for him to disclose his preference. I shall ever regret should you and he fail to reach an understanding in this matter.

MARTHA. I don't know why I have permitted you to discuss this subject with me. Possibly I feel the need of confession. At all events, I trust you so fully that I dare tell you that I am unhappy because I fear Captain Grantham may never comprehend how much he is to me.

LAURENCE. I fear the future for you both. Three words will break down the barrier now separating you. I would be sorry if his or your life should be blighted as mine has been.

MARTHA. Your past has been unhappy, but not a discreditable past. Of that I am assured. (*Earnestly.*) Captain Laurence, you have made me disclose a secret that I had dared hardly to acknowledge to myself. Trust me with yours. I may help you. Remember the fable of the "Lion and the Mouse."

LAURENCE. Your reference to Aesop's is not applicable. But I have made allusion to my past and therefore I have given you the right to know something of that past. Remember that I do not blame the woman that wrecked my life with aught that is wrong. She was only a child, with no one to guide her. Indeed, appearances justified the conclusions she reached.

MARTHA. How long ago did this happen? The girl—where is she now?

LAURENCE. It occurred nearly five years ago. I do not know where my wife now is. Probably in Southern France, for as a child

she passed a winter there with her guardian. I have not seen her since the hour we were wed.

MARTHA. She was your wife, then? You know nothing of her whereabouts?

LAURENCE. I know nothing save that she is still alive. My lawyers have her address, where remittances are made to her. I never asked them to give it to me. She left me of her own sugggestion. She must return to me, if ever, of her own option.

MARTHA. Never saw her since your marriage?

LAURENCE. Only in dreams. While I was ill recently, when my mind was responsive to the weakness of the body, I thought sometimes that she was at my bedside. Of course, it was merely a delusion, born of confused sad memories.

MARTHA. Your runaway wife was a mere child. How old did you say?

LAURENCE. Only fourteen. Yes, a child. (*Nancy enters, comes forward, is about to return, but stops.*) She was my uncle's ward. He wished that we should marry. He spoke to me so often, and in his letters never tired of praising her qualities of mind and heart, and he so joyed in her budding beauty, that I learned to love her, and this feeling was intensified when we were thrown together at intervals when I visited my uncle.

MARTHA. Your parents—were they favorable to the match?

LAURENCE. My parents died when I was an infant. Uncle loved me, although my grandfather had used me as a means to do uncle a grievous wrong. Uncle, as guardian for his ward, had invested her fortune in securities that subsequently became almost worthless. When I received orders for foreign service, he sent for me, although he had written a letter that fully explained the conditions that would exist in the event of his death. He little thought my visit would bring death to him.

MARTHA. I do not understand.

LAURENCE. You will presently. A heavy storm had washed the roads and I was delayed in reaching the Oaks. Nancy Worthington, the name of my uncle's ward, and I were married within an hour after my arrival. The unexpected call of a clergyman at the house gave opportunity to carry out uncle's and my wish.

MARTHA. Why was the marriage hastened?

LAURENCE. Uncle well knew that his life hung by a thread and any undue excitement might prove immediately fatal. He believed his ward and I were attached to each other. He feared that should he die, when the fact that Nancy's fortune had been injudiciously invested became known, even in his grave he would be reviled as a dishonest man who had failed in the faithful discharge of a trust he had accepted.

MARTHA. But I do not comprehend how the marriage could prevent that.

LAURENCE. I was heir to all my grandfather's possessions. That marriage entered into, Nancy would never feel the want of her individual fortune. I promised uncle to replace it out of the income of the estate, for uncle was lavish in expenditures and knew not how to economize. I did make Nancy's fortune secure, but not in the way uncle and I proposed.

MARTHA. But the marriage. Was it a mere business problem?

LAURENCE. No. My fate was decided by a series of accidents. I was delayed by official duty in my visit to the Oaks. In the hurry of departure for the north, I unwittingly changed cloaks with a fellow

officer. After our marriage, in my hasty return, I left the cloak at the Oaks. When it was found, a letter was found also. I never saw the letter. It had been written by the wife to her husband and announced the birth of a son. It was addressed to the husband, and signed merely by the title of wife. No names. As it was open, uncle read the letter, designing, if necessary, to forward it to me by a post rider to insure its reaching me before we sailed.

MARTHA. But that could all have been explained satisfactorily.

LAURENCE. It could have been explained fully, but the shock was fatal to my uncle. He died almost immediately, believing that I had actually committed bigamy and had added to the family dishonor, instead of protecting the name from even the suspicion of infamy, as I had promised him I would.

MARTHA. Your wife, what of her?

LAURENCE. She believed that my crime had slain her "Dad," her pet name for her guardian; that I was already married; and that the ceremony just performed was a nullity. Hence, after the funeral of her guardian, she left the Oaks the same day, and I have never seen her since our wedding morn.

MARTHA. I think you said you made no attempt to learn of her whereabouts.

LAURENCE. No. I felt that I was the party aggrieved. (*Pauses.*)

MARTHA. Yes—well—continue. I am interested.

LAURENCE. She communicated with my—and indeed her—lawyers. I instructed them to negotiate a loan on mortgage of the estate—I could do that without her joining in the indenture—for the full amount of her individual fortune. It turned out there were many claims against the estate, due to the dishonesty of the manager, who embezzled the income and left unpaid debts, which finally amounted to a large fortune. I could have legally avoided most of those charges, but that would have brought upon my uncle's memory the odium he dreaded. I made additional loans, those claims were paid, and finally the estate was sold on foreclosure. I had left to me hardly one thousand pounds.

MARTHA. You were the victim of a budget of blunders, of which you are not wholly guiltless. Your wife should have been found and informed of the true condition of affairs. Had that been done you would not have been ruined.

LAURENCE. Possibly, but she shut the door to all explanation.

MARTHA. Well, it has all resulted disastrously to you.

LAURENCE. No British officer can support himself on his pay. Little by little my capital dwindled away, live as carefully as I could without earning the contempt of my fellows. I have hardly three hundred pounds left to me in all the world. I sold my commission, and now I am actually no longer in the King's military service. I have decided to settle in the Colonies, for let the present struggle eventuate as it may, here will be presented opportunities for a poor man to make his way to fortune, that are denied him in the mother country. I will not enter the American Army in this quarrel between King and Colonies. I could not do that.

MARTHA. Do you no longer love your wife?

LAURENCE. I never doubted my love for her until recently. I now know another woman has usurped the place she once held in my affections. It is for that reason I must leave here presently.

MARTHA. You have met that woman recently? Is she—

LAURENCE. (*Interrupting her.*) I have told you more than I ought to have done. Keep my secret as I shall keep yours. I did not know the old wound would bleed so freely. My life is a weary burden

to me now. (*Walks towards door with head down.*) (*Nancy hides behind a window curtain.*) Pardon me, I will not longer annoy you with my unhappy past. (*Bows and exits.*)

MARTHA. Poor fellow! Fate has dealt roughly with him.

NANCY. (*Excitedly, approaching Martha.*) How did you win this man's confidence? You have already the devoted love of Captain Grantham. That should suffice. I tell you that Captain Laurence Barrington shall not be made the sport of a coquettish woman. I will not permit it.

MARTHA. Nancy, you are beside yourself. I do not seek the love of Captain Laurence. But you gave him another name. I thought his surname and yours were alike.

NANCY. They are. My name is Nancy Barrington—I am Laurence Barrington's wife. No woman shall now come between his love and me. He loves me. Make no mistake. And I will hold his heart against the world. He has outlined to you something of his life, but to me who knows much that was untold, as I listened, my eyes were opened to the truth. I did not know until this hour the dire consequences of my impulsive, heedless act. I was driven to it under the smart of what I thought was a premeditated wrong to me and to my poor dead "Dad." I held my life as ended until this last month, and sought relief in doling my days out in acts of charity. Martha Bunting, for God's sake do not drive me to desperation.

MARTHA. I do not love your husband. Had you been here earlier you would have heard me confess my love for Captain Grantham. He was pleading for Grantham, who is too timid to plead for himself. His own sad story was merely used to illustrate his appeal for his friend.

NANCY. Before high heaven, do you speak only the truth?

MARTHA. On my soul's salvation, I tell you only the truth.

NANCY. (*Catching Martha in her arms.*) I could worship you for those words. You do not know what they mean to me. Once while my husband lay hovering between life and death, I stooped and kissed him, and I heard him say in a weak whisper "I love you, Nancy, my wife." I was then still blind to the truth, ignorant of his noble acts, but I felt even then that I was his and he was mine, regardless of any barrier that might interpose between us.

MARTHA. Shall I tell him Nancy who you are? That you, the matured woman, and the girl whom he married nearly five years ago are the same?

NANCY. No! no! That might be fatal. I shall win him back unaided. He loves me. He is fighting against that love now, for he has no thought that I am his runaway wife. That, I must tell him. He must hear that from no other lips but mine. Martha, forgive me for my suspicions, for everything I have said to you in my anger. I was wild with jealousy, and for the moment, I believed you had stolen his heart from me. You will forgive me, won't you?

MARTHA. I have nothing to forgive. Go to your room, Nancy, and you will soon be the placid Nancy Laurence. (*Knock.*) Someone is coming. (*Captain Grantham opens door, and enters.*)

NANCY. I will do as you suggest, Martha. Captain, I cannot tell you how much I love Martha Bunting. (*Exit.*)

GRANTHAM. No, I can't tell you either. I didn't mean that, Mistress Bunting. I hope you won't be angry with me for what I have said.

MARTHA. Why, no sensible girl is ever angry because some one loves her. That is usually a pleasant thing to be told one.

GRANTHAM. Yes, I suppose so. By the way, Mistress Bunting, did you ever suspect that I am in love?

MARTHA. (*Pleased yet surprised.*) Why, how could I suspect that? Why should I?

GRANTHAM. It is true, however. Now you and I are the best of friends. As a friend, I thought I would ask your advice and suggestion. You will advise me, won't you?

MARTHA. (*Startled. Aside.*) Can I have been so gravely mistaken? I have learned to love this man, who now comes and asks me to tell him how to woo another woman! I am the most miserable girl in all this colony! (*Aloud to Grantham.*) I have no experience in such matters, but so far as my judgment may serve, I will try to help you by suggestion.

GRANTHAM. Thank you. What I want to know is how should a timid man propose to a girl he loves? Take my case for instance. Should I learn by rote some accepted poetical masterpiece and disclose to the woman I love my passion for her by declaiming the poet's verse.

MARTHA. No! no! That would be altogether objectionable on such an occasion. It would certainly not be flattering to the lady. She would prefer almost anything in preference to that.

GRANTHAM. Should I propose to her by letter?

MARTHA. That is sometimes done, Captain, but it robs the incident of much of the sentiment which should ever be associated with that most important event in a woman's life.

GRANTHAM. Well, suppose I chanced to be standing near her as I am now near to you. Should I go down on my knees, and—

MARTHA. Kneeling at such times has now gone out, if it ever was in fashion.

GRANTHAM. Suppose then I stood back of her, as I now stand back of your chair, and suddenly I should stoop and kiss her, do you think she would understand, or would she resent the act and banish me from her presence?

MARTHA. (*Sadly.*) If she loves you, Captain Grantham, she would understand.

GRANTHAM. You are sure of that?

MARTHA. Beyond all doubt. I am certain. (*Grantham stoops quickly and kisses her.*)

GRANTHAM. I acted upon your advice, Mistress Bunting. You are not angry with me? Say you are not?

MARTHA. (*Rising, and in anxious tones.*) Tell me, Captain Grantham, do you mean that you—

GRANTHAM. That I love you. If you don't love me, I will be very, very sorry. I didn't mean to annoy you. I will go away and not trouble you further. I have written a letter asking to be called into active service immediately. I will send it off at once by an express rider.

MARTHA. You are not sufficiently recovered to bear the hardships of camp life. You mustn't go. You would break my heart, Captain Grantham, if you endangered unnecessarily your—your—(*whimpers.*)

GRANTHAM. Yes! Well! What?

MARTHA. (*Slipping her hand into his.*) Well, you were hardly fair in what you did just now.

GRANTHAM. Why! I don't understand.

MARTHA. You kissed me to declare your love for me, didn't you do that, Captain?

GRANTHAM. I dared not proclaim it in words.

MARTHA. But why did you deny me opportunity to show you in like manner my love for you?

GRANTHAM. Were you willing to kiss me?

MARTHA. Of course I was, and am still willing, you silly goose. (*Grantham catches her in his arms.*) Why, I have loved you ever since I knew you. Certainly since the afternoon you leaped into Chester creek and saved my life. Why, dearest, I believe I should have so far forgotten womanly custom as to have told my love to you had you not lead me astray by asking my advice, as a friend, how you should propose to some other girl. You almost broke my heart when you did that.

GRANTHAM. Martha, my darling, I never could have mustered up courage to propose to you in so many words. Why, I can only wonder that I had spunk enough even to kiss you. But, did I propose to you after all?

MARTHA. Of course you did. You just put the seal of love on my lips. That was your beautiful way of asking me to be your wife. Don't you see how much that meant?

GRANTHAM. Well, if you say you understood that I asked you to be my wife, I am just too glad for anything. I was afraid I had only got half through the job and you hadn't given me any advice how I was to proceed next after the kissing.

MARTHA. Charlie, I'll undertake to teach you now. I rather like being a tutor—a tutor for you, I mean.

GRANTHAM. It is true, though, that I have asked to rejoin my regiment, but the doctor says I am not physically able to resume active duty immediately.

MARTHA. Your immediate duty is to me at present. For several months, I have been wretchedly uncertain as to your feeling for me, but now— (*Enter Barrington.*)

BARRINGTON. Pardon me. One of the negroes, Ananias, I think stated that on the Queen's highway, a short distance from Chester, Wagon-Master Jordan has been found foully murdered, and that Moses has stupidly associated me with the crime. I learn that a number of discharged Continental soldiers, who have been drinking during the day, design to inflict punishment on me for a deed in which I had no part. Captain Grantham, I propose to go forth and meet these men. (*Enter Nancy, Anna, and Ananias.*)

ANANIAS. Deed, Misses, dat fool Moses jes done de bisness. He likes to har hisself talk. He don't tent to do no harm, but he jes swelled up wif conceit like a toad when de drunken soldiers got 'round him, and den he lied like a cryer at a public sale—he feld so 'portant. He lowed dat de Captain here was de Lord knows who; dat he was so rich dat he had to hire sev'ral chaps to help him spend his money; dat he was as strong as Goliath; that he and Master Jordan had squarreled about somethin' and de Captain jest fetched him a lick wif his fist and busted him wide open, and—

NANCY. Never mind. That is enough of that twaddle. I learn that Master Jordan has been shot. A number of the men of the 5th Pennsylvania Line, recruited from this neighborhood, were discharged this morning. Within a week most of them will re-enlist, but many of them are now drunk and quarrelsome. This foolish boasting of Moses, for it was only that, has so inflamed them that you must go into hiding, Captain Laurence, for a few hours. If they were to capture you now, I fear serious injuries, if not death, would be inflicted on you in the drunken rage of these soldiers, who, if sober, would not molest you.

LAURENCE. I have nothing to conceal. I have done no wrong. I have never seen Master Jordan to know him. In all my life I have

never sought safety in hiding. Mine has not been such a life that I should sacrifice my honor, which is more to me than life, to save it.

NANCY. (*Anxiously.*) But your life is everything to others. (*Laurence shakes his head.*) I will not have it so. You were pleased to tell me I had been kind to you. You will not be unkind to me now. When I ask you to do this for me, you shelter your denial of my wish behind your honor. Before Heaven, Captain Laurence, I am the last person who would advise you to your shame. A few hours, and the ferocity of the mob will spend itself. Then you can face the world with unsullied reputation. Won't you do that for me?

LAURENCE. For you I would do anything that an honorable man can do. But—

GRANTHAM. Captain Laurence, Mistress Nancy is right in this. I would stake my soul on her judgment.

MARTHA. (*Aside to Grantham.*) Bless you for that. (*Aloud.*) Captain Laurence, you cannot refuse Nancy's request. Trust her womanly impulse and all will be well.

LAURENCE. (*Aside to Martha.*) You know my unhappy life. A married man, and yet I love that woman (*points to Nancy*) with a hopeless love. Possibly in facing the mob, I shall escape years devoid of happiness.

MARTHA. (*Aside to Laurence.*) That is a coward's reasoning. You are not a coward. How about her, for she loves you. The morrow may be full of joy for you both.

LAURENCE. (*Aloud.*) As you all will it so, I consent.

NANCY. (*Aside to Martha.*) He yields to you and the others. He was deaf to my pleadings.

MARTHA. (*Aside.*) Woman, you are madly jealous. Nancy, he loves you. It is of you he is now thinking—not himself. Let me disclose the truth?

NANCY. (*Aside.*) No! no! Not you! Again I say I alone must tell it him, if he ever learns the truth.

GRANTHAM. What is to be done must be done quickly. Your plans, Mistress Nancy?

NANCY. The old archway of the granary is a place accursed. The superstitious people dread the ghost of the murdered girl that haunts that spot. We will hasten there. A boat is moored in the creek, at that place. Captain Laurence can reach it and make his way to the New Jersey shore.

MOSES. (*Running in.*) Dey is acomin'. I'se bin a natural-born durn fool wif my tongue, but you'se folks run, and Moses will hol his house agin de crowd tel dey jest hack him into mincemeat.

NANCY. Moses, you must come with us. We can elude the pursuit if we act immediately. Come one and all. There is now no time to lose. (*Stage darkened.*)

[SCENE 2. *The old archway of the granary. Thunder is heard and lightning now and then illuminates the rear of the stage. Laurence, Nancy, Grantham, Martha, Anna, Moses, and Ananias discovered.*]

ANNA. I will keep watch here, while you cast the boat adrift. The mob have already learned of our flight. (*Dog's bray is heard.*) Nancy, they have loosened your pet, Tip. He will guide them to us. You must be quick, whatever is to be done.

GRANTHAM. In this darkness, I cannot undo the painter. If I only had a light for a moment.

MOSES. (*Produces piece of heavy tarred rope.*) Bless de Lord. I done got an oakum torch wif me.

MARTHA. I'm not afraid. I will run across to Mr. Graham's and get steel and tinder. I do not fear these men. They are of my people and will not harm me.

ANNA. (*Tossing box to Grantham.*). I have steel and tinder. Hurry, for you have little time. (*Grantham strikes a light. Noise of approaching men is heard.*)

NANCY. Give me the torch. (*To Laurence.*) Get you into the boat. It will be cast adrift presently.

LAURENCE. I will not go if danger threatens you, my friends.

ANNA. *They are here.* (*Enters mob of intoxicated soldiers in ragged uniforms.*)

DRUNKEN SOLDIER. No you don't. You overshot the mark, my lady. Some of us ain't afeared of ghosts. We are tracking a murderer. Mistress Nancy, we will do no harm to any of you, but that man we will have— (*About to advance.*)

NANCY. (*With torch in her hand.*) Stand back! every man of you, if you would not die. You know that I have never lied to you. I am not lying to you now. Some of you know that in the cellar of this building is stored fifty kegs of powder. Several of the packages are broken; more or less of the powder is strewn over the other packages. I do not wish to do anyone harm, but if you enter this archway I will cast this lighted torch into that cellar through that open window, as surely as there is a God. This man is innocent of all wrong, and you shall not murder him, if to prevent that I am compelled to stain my soul with a hundred lives.

(*Crowd hesitates. The boat is cast off with Laurence in it and drifts away, as the curtain falls.*)

ACT IV.

[SCENE.—*Sitting-room in Hospital. Moses and Ananias discovered.*]

ANANIAS. Look yer, you Moses. If it hadn't ben for de powerful grit ob Mistress Nancy, de crowd would hab got de Captain certain. Dat ought to done and learn you dat it's a good thin' to go slow and keep de brakes on you'se tongue. I 'clar to goodness dat of dey didn't stopped right den, de young Misses would hab flung dat chunk ob flamin' oakum right into de cellar ob de granary and whar you ben now?

MOSES. I don't know whar I ha' ben, but whar you'se all ben if she had frowed it. I jes think only ob her, fo' she neber done me no harm, but allus had a smile and a good word to say to me. Many de hidin' she saved me from, and many de shillin' she slipped into my hand, when I hadn't done nothin' why she should do dat. Ananias, she's an angel. Dat's what she is. And it hurted me right here (*putting his hand on his heart*) when I found dat I had done and put her in all dat trouble.

ANANIAS. It war jes 'cause you'se mouf de bigges' part of you'se.

MOSES. I didn't 'tend no harm en what I said. I was jes glorying de Captain. I thought she'd like dat. (*Coming close to Ananias.*) As sure as you'se borned, Misses Nancy jes worships de groun' whar Captain Laurence walks. I didn't 'tend to spy on her, but 'bout a week or ten days ago, de Captain war asleep on de settee—fo' dey had gib him de medicine to make him sleep—and when I went into de room,

fo' I didn't know nobody war dar, she moaned out "Forgive me, I didn't know what I did." Hope I may die right now ef I'd seed her do nothin' to go on 'bout like dat.

ANANIAS. You don't know nuffin, nohow. It jest makes me sick to har you talk 'bout de women. A gal jes as often cries when she feels good as when she's miserable. Now dar's Misses Martha. I jes har her a half hour ago tell her Ma dat Captain Grantham had 'posed to her, and she busted out a cryin' for all she war worth, yet she kept kissin' de ole Misses and "claring" dat she war de happiest gal in all de world. When you'se gits as ole as I is, you 'low dat women is curious— (*Enters Grantham.*)

GRANTHAM. What is curious, Ananias? Has anything gone wrong?

ANANIAS. No, sir. I war jes tellin' Moses har dat he didn't know nothin' 'bout women folks.

GRANTHAM. Do you?

ANANIAS. More dan he does. I was tryin' to 'splain to him why Misses Martha, when she done tole her Ma dat you had gone and 'posed to her, jest cried and 'peated to de ole Misses dat she war de happiest gal in all de world.

GRANTHAM. Did she say that, Ananias?

ANANIAS. I cross my breaf ef it ain't true, Captain.

GRANTHAM. Ananias, here's a shilling for you. If you come to the house to-morrow I have a suit of clothing that does not fit me exactly. I think they will fit you. If you want them, I will give them to you.

ANANIAS. Thank you, Captain. I'll come dead sure, to-morrow mornin' jest after breakfast, for I'se got an errand to do near you'se house.

GRANTHAM. I will look for you then. But you must not tell anyone about Mistress Martha. She would not, and I shall not like it if you did that. You may go now. (*Moses and Ananias walk up stage.*)

ANANIAS. I wonder what made de Captain gib me dat shillin' and promise me dat suit ob cloth? Sometimes, Moses, de white man is jes as curious and hard to calclate on as de white gal.

MOSES. Umph! I 'spect de black man and gal is jes as funny, 'casionally. I seed dem do bery shonanegan things in my time, dat I couldn't 'splain nohow. (*Exit Moses and Ananias.*)

GRANTHAM. I suppose it is all right that I should be as happy as I am, yet I cannot but feel exceedingly anxious as to Nancy and Laurence. Confound that fellow! He is Nancy's husband and I know he is in love with his own wife. Martha told me that Nansy loves him with all her heart, but Martha doesn't know that he is Nancy's husband. The surprising part is that Laurence is ignorant that Nancy is his wife, and I have promised not to tell him the one thing that he above all men ought to know. How will it all end? Of course, she was merely a budding girl of five years ago; now she is a matured woman, and it all happened in England. Nancy must know that he loves her, for you can trust a woman to read the man she fancies. If it were not for this odd condition of affairs, Laurence would speak out, like the sensible man he is. But he certainly has not said a word to her that would lead to an explanation. I acknowledge that I am all in a muddle. Any riddle in which a woman figures is beyond my solution.

MARTHA. (*Entering.*) I didn't expect to find you here. (*Grantham acts as if about to leave.*) Oh! I didn't want you to go away. I'd rather you would stay. I ran over to see Nancy, for she seemed

greatly unnerved by the exciting scene she went through at the granary. It must now be near 10 o'clock and I will be afraid to return home alone. I would feel far safer if you went with me. Some of the intoxicated soldiers are still abroad, and I'd be dreadfully scared if I should meet them by myself.

GRANTHAM. All right, I will protect you. I'm not afraid of a man.

MARTHA. You are not afraid of me, Captain?

GRANTHAM. No. That is, I'm not so much now as I was once upon a time. You see, Martha, I'm not afraid now to tell you I love you. The thing that bothers me is to understand how you can reciprocate my affections. I can't see how a woman can tolerate a chump of a fellow who lacks grit.

MARTHA. Charlie, notwithstanding your timidity, I love you. Why I am not afraid to place myself under your protection as long as I shall live. You dear old boy, you don't know what a manly man you are. Captain Laurence in speaking to me termed you a splendid fellow. Yet he doesn't know how good you have been to Nancy, and how you lent strength to her when she was almost heart broken for fear that Laurence would die without recognizing her and forgiving her for her sad mistake. If she would only let me tell Laurence the truth, I know all would be right.

GRANTHAM. Oh! you know more than I thought you did. However, Nancy is right. But I should not have spoken to you about this at all.

MARTHA. You would not have spoken to me of this until she gives her consent for you to do so?

GRANTHAM. No. Her secret is not mine to tell even to you, and she never gave her consent that I should do so. I do not know how far I am justified even now in discussing her affairs with you.

MARTHA. I think you are real mean not to trust me. What right have you to share a secret with any other woman. Charlie, I did not mean what I said, indeed I didn't. I just think you are splendid. A man who will not tell his—I mean his girl friend. No, I don't mean that either—his only girl friend a secret that has been given to him in confidence, will not betray the confidence placed in him by his—his best girl friend. He can be trusted to be true to his vows to her.

GRANTHAM. Didn't you intend to say wife instead of his only girl friend?

MARTHA. Yes, I did. But I haven't gotten quite accustomed to the word yet, Charlie.

GRANTHAM. Don't you know I've written Martha Grantham a dozen times in the last hour to see how it looked on paper.

MARTHA. Did you never do it before to-day, Charlie?

GRANTHAM. Well, well, yes. But—

MARTHA. You haven't asked me if I ever wrote that name before to-day? (*Draws close to him.*) Why, you darling, I have been practicing on that name for a year nearly. It isn't hard for me to write it now. (*Takes his face between her hands.*) But I was afraid until to-day that my practicing might not amount to anything. But now I'm the happiest girl in all the world.

GRANTHAM. Haven't you said that once before to-day?

MARTHA. Who told you so?

GRANTHAM. I heard it, pet, and I determined that I would try to make that declaration the truth, if it laid in my power to do so. I have something to tell you. I have received since I saw you, by a

special express, orders to report for duty, if the surgeon consents, and—and—

MARTHA. (*Anxiously.*) Well, well, tell me. You ought to tell me everything now.

GRANTHAM. Yes, everything I have the right to tell you. Darling, I want you to write without blushing the name Martha Grantham. I want you to have the right to do that before I shall go again to the front.

MARTHA. (*Shaking her head.*) Why I couldn't—I couldn't get ready in less than a fortnight.

GRANTHAM. Well, let us say this day fortnight? (*Martha hesitates.*) You won't consent?

MARTHA. I didn't say I wouldn't. Well, just to please you (*putting her hand in his*) if you want it so, yes.

GRANTHAM. That is all settled to my, and darling I hope to your, liking. Now let us search for Nancy, for it is growing late and she may not wish us to remain here in her private apartments. I am anxious about Laurence. I have come to esteem him highly. He had no money with him before the mob sought to capture him. That I know. No one is likely to have furnished him with any at the granary, unless Nancy did, for she thinks of all such essential details, and she may know where remittances can be forwarded to him.

MARTHA. (*As she and Grantham walk up stage.*) We will find her somewhere in the garden. It will be well to talk that matter over with her. (*Exit.*)

LAURENCE. (*Outside the window, which he opens carefully and enters. Takes large, old-fashioned pistol from breast, and lays it on the table.*) I cannot avoid this shameful return. Every penny I own in the world is in the pocket of my uniform coat. I trust I shall arouse no one, that I can get the wallet without being seen, and that I can slip away no one the wiser. (*Nancy enters from chamber, starts then goes to rear of stage.*) This room surely is not the one I occupied. I do not remember that a door opened from it into another apartment.

NANCY. (*Advancing.*) You here? I do not understand. You should have been now in New Jersey.

LAURENCE. Mistress Nancy. You are a brave woman not to scream. You will believe me when I assure you that I came here with no evil or dishonest purpose.

NANCY. I have never questioned your honesty since we met in Chester. But again I ask you why are you here?

LAURENCE. The boat was a seive. It hardly carried me to the opposite side of the creek before it sank to the gunwales. In the darkness I was a long time finding the King's highway. That I followed crossing the bridge and came directly here. I was without money. In a wallet in my uniform coat, that I wore when brought here wounded, was nearly 300 pounds in notes and specie. I came for that. I did not wish that anyone should know that I had returned here, but I seem to have mistaken the apartments.

NANCY. (*Eagerly.*) You came for nothing else? There is nothing else you will miss on leaving Chester?

LAURENCE. Yes. But nothing that I can ever hope to attain. Fate has decreed otherwise.

NANCY. Tell me what you propose to do? You must tell me that.

LAURENCE. I know you do not ask merely from idle curiosity. I will attempt to reach Philadelphia. Burton has already gone there, in my interest. At that city, I will subscribe to the oath required from foreigners.

NANCY. What then? Tell me, what then?

LAURENCE. Chance must determine that. I shall not in any event enter the Continental Army. I have held the King's Commission. I cannot forget that. In this struggle, I will not take up arms against my late companions. I have some capital. With that I shall embark in business in a small way, in the shipping line probably, where my experience in the army may prove not wholly without value.

NANCY. You came here unobserved?

LAURENCE. I met two or three drunken men in James street. I am positive that they did not recognize me.

NANCY. (*While speaking draws window shutters to, bolts them, and puts bar at door.*) In that you err. Those men recognized you. A warrant has already been issued for your arrest on a charge of murder. An attempt will be made to take you into custody, maybe to-night. I believed you would come back here, but I did not anticipate that it would be so soon. I feel nervous and overwrought. Be seated, Captain.

LAURENCE. I shall not put you again in peril. I ought not to have returned, but I am a stranger recently wounded, and were I without money for pressing needs, I would soon be in dire want. Work is not easily obtained in these troublesome times. Capital can always command opportunity.

NANCY. I have your wallet. But you must not go now; not until morning at least. Your life would be imperilled if you were captured. In a few hours you will be no longer under suspicion, but at this moment your life may pay the penalty of your temerity.

LAURENCE. But there is more at stake than my life. Whose apartments are these?

NANCY. Mine. You will be safe here.

LAURENCE. My safety purchased at your cost. Your fame sullied that I may live dishonored! The men whom I met to-night, in their drunken conversation, coupled our names together. I will not have your purity smirched by the least act of mine. Your good name is dearer to me than my own life.

NANCY. Captain Laurence, I cannot tell you how glad I am to hear you say that. I hold my good name beyond all price. But I assure you that your act will not impugn my honor in the least. You must stay—you shall not leave this room to-night to go probably to your death. (*Places her hand on his arm.*) You will stay? Promise me you will stay?

LAURENCE. You do not know what you ask. You do not know how hard you make it for me.

NANCY. (*Still clinging to his arm.*) What do I not know? Tell me? Why do you not act as I pray you to do? You will say yes for me? You will promise me that you will? I beg that from you with all my soul! I am here and—

LAURENCE. It is because you are here that I must go. I do not fear the drunken rabble. You and you only are the controlling reason that compells me to leave this place.

NANCY. (*Sobbing. Sinks into a chair.*) Then I am so offensive to you that you cannot even remain in the same place with me?

LAURENCE. You do not understand! You do not comprehend. Listen then to me. I am madly in love with you. I had never thought to tell you this.

NANCY. If you love me, you will yield to my request. You surely would not break my heart, if you loved me.

LAURENCE. I love you with all my soul. God help me, I have fought against this love ever since I have been in this town.

NANCY. Why? Why? Tell me why?

LAURENCE. I cannot lay an honorable love at your feet. I will offer you no other. Never until I met you have I felt the fetters in which the past holds me. I am a married man. Husband of a runaway wife of whose present whereabouts I am now absolutely ignorant.

NANCY. (*Anxiously.*) Do you love your wife? Were she to come to you and declare in all truth that she had designedly done no wrong to you, in what she did; that she loved you and has always loved you, would you not have compassion for her? If she declared truthfully that all she asks in life is the opportunity to show in her devotion that you and you only are all the world to her, would you turn from her in anger? You would not do that? Tell me, you would not crush her in your righteous indignation?

LAURENCE. Will you not understand? It is you that has come between me and my wife. Again I say that I never thought to tell you this. But I have loved you from the moment I heard your voice when wounded I was brought to this hospital. It has all been Fate's doing. Had I died then it would have been God's mercy for me. I have dared to tell you this that you may see why I cannot yield to your request.

NANCY. But I—have I nothing at stake? Have I no part in this? Am I not to be considered? Not considered even if I tell you that you own my heart so wholly that you are all the world to me?

LAURENCE. I have never before played the coward's part. I have known that I should have gone from here long ago; but my love for you made me defer from day to day the sad hour that would separate us forever.

NANCY. (*Coming closer to him.*) You must have known that you had won my love. You could not be ignorant of that?

LAURENCE. To my shame, I did—I do know. You kissed me once when you believed me sleeping under the influence of a drug. I had thrown the mixture away, prompted to the act by an impulse I could not resist. That kiss told me all.

NANCY. Yes, I have learned to love you so well that there is nothing I would not sacrifice for you, save your honor and mine.

LAURENCE. You must not tell me this.

NANCY. Your wife—she was a child almost? (*Laurence nods sadly.*) An unformed character that was yours to mould as you willed. She did love you. That you must never doubt.

LAURENCE. You plead for her?

NANCY. I am a woman who has known and been fashioned by great sorrows and cruel disappointments. You tell me that you are a married man. I am a married woman, who, like your wife, is not living with her husband. I am guiltless of all intentional wrong to my husband. I have never betrayed his honor even in thought. Yet I love you with all the fervor a woman's heart can know. Don't you understand? I put your declarations to the proof. If you love me, if you care for my good name in this community, you will remain here and protect me from evil tongues. I will go mad if you deny me this request. Blind! Blind! Can you not see?

LAURENCE. These are your apartments. You have closed the window and have barred the door. In your fear for me you have staked everything that women hold supreme. I could not doubt your love for me, yet should it be learned that I am here or have been here alone with you at this hour of the night, your reputation would be smirched beyond all redemption. I cannot consent to live, knowing that you

gave all that is most precious to a pure woman to save me. (*Goes toward door.*)

NANCY. (*Springs before him. Noise heard without.*) You shall not go. The mob is already here. (*Door shaken and cry without "Open in the name of the Commonwealth."*) You have promised to preserve my good name even at the peril of your life. You can only guard my honor by remaining here. Justice Graham knows that I am a married woman—he knows much of my past. I shall claim you as my husband; you must claim me as your wife.

LAURENCE. Would to God I could! (*Door begins to yield.*) (*To Nancy.*) You have made my escape impossible now. (*Points.*) On that table is a laoded pistol. I know it is loaded, for I placed it there when I entered these apartments. Take it and use it as if you were holding me at bay. Let the mob do its worst to me, but your honor must be saved. Your womanly purity must be unchallenged. My life shall not be purchased by your shame. (*Crowd breaks in, pushing in Graham, Grantham, Martha, Anna, Moses and Ananias.*)

JUSTICE GRAHAM. (*Pointing to Laurence.*) Is tnat the man you seek?

CROWD. Yes, yes, that is James Dougherty!

GRAHAM. That is not James Dougherty. I have known him for eight or nine years. The warrant orders the arrest of James Dougherty on a charge of murdering Mr. Jordan. Why, this man has been a patient in this hospital for nearly six weeks. He is only convalescent now.

NANCY. Captain Laurence was within this building when Mr. Jordan was murdered. Mistress Bunting, Captain Grantham, myself, and others will be qualified to that statement. The foolish chattering of a negro slave, who by law cannot be a witness against a white person in our courts, is alone responsible for this mistake, which might have proved very serious.

GRAHAM. (*To the crowd.*) Good people of Chester, I assure you that man is not the one you seek. I congratulate you that any serious consequences of this error have been happily averted. These are Mistress Nancy Laurence's private apartments. She has been much tried to-day. You will therefore retire. (*Exit crowd.*) Mistress Nancy, I have a few words for you privately.

NANCY. No, Mr. Graham. Whatever you wish to say, say it openly.

GRAHAM. This gentleman has fortunately for himself been relieved from all suspicion. But there is a matter that needs explanation. When you came to Chester, you brought with you letters from some of my near relatives in London, commending you to my personal consideration. I made you welcome. For a time you were even of my own family circle. I became socially responsible for you. These are your private apartments. (*Nancy nods.*) It cannot be denied that this gentleman and you have been alone here at this hour of the night. That you two were attached to each other has been generally spoken of in the town, not, however, to the discredit of either. Now it cannot be gainsaid the people had to force the barred door to gain access to this room. What explanation have you to give of these peculiar circumstances?

LAURENCE. Mr. Graham, you greatly exceed your authority by such questions and innuendoes. I will not permit you, Mistress Nancy, to answer these questions.

NANCY. Pardon me, but in that I think you err. I have nothing to fear in proclaiming any act of mine. This gentleman was with me

in these apartments. A husband has the right to be with his wife at all times and in all places, he may choose without compromising her good name or sullying her wifely reputation.

GRAHAM. This lady is your wife? I knew she was married, but I did not even know her husband's name. I regret that you did not give your relationship publicity several weeks ago. Had that been done, certain it is you would have escaped the annoyance and danger to which you have been subjected. In wishing you good-night, I also wish you and your good wife happiness. (*Exit.*)

LAURENCE. (*Aside to Nancy.*) We have only floundered yet deeper into difficulties. How will you explain later our relationship towards each other?

NANCY. I have already explained that relationship as fully as I ever design to explain it to my friends or to strangers. Martha, I shall not have to eplain this matter to you? Nor to you, Captain Grantham, I fancy?

GRANTHAM. No, you need not explain this matter to me. Martha has done that already.

MARTHA. Nancy, Captain Grantham and I are to be married within a fortnight. I couldn't, indeed I couldn't, keep any secret from him to save my soul. I had to tell him all about it. Then I guessed that he had been let partly into the secret by you, Mistress Nancy, yourself.

LAURENCE. It seems that I am the only one, save Moses and Ananias, who appears to be ignorant of what has taken place. As it concerns me, I think, more than anyone here, excepting this lady (*Points to Nancy*) I would be glad if someone will give me knowledge of this secret.

NANCY. Laurence Barrington, have you never suspected who I am? Do you not now understand that Nancy Worthington, the girl you wed nearly five years ago, has grown into matured womanhood, and that Nancy Worthington and Nancy Laurence are the same person. I am your runaway wife—this paper substantiates that. (*Takes certificate from bosom and displays it.*) I have tried to win you anew. Laurence, when you told me I was my own rival in your love, you made me the happiest of women. Won't you pardon me, my husband? (*Sinks to her knees.*) Won't you accept me as your dutiful, devoted wife? (*Laurence seems confused.*) You refused me once in this room to-night the first request I had made of you for five long years. Do not refuse me again? It would be far more merciful should you kill me than to close your heart to me now. Tell me as you told me a short time ago that you love me with all your soul! Tell me that you love Nancy Barrington, your wife, as fervidly as you love Nancy Laurence? Laurence, I have hungered for your love ever since I can remember anything. Forgive me for all the wrong I have done you, Laurence, my husband? Will you not make me happy in your forgiveness? (*Extends her arms to him.*)

LAURENCE. Nancy, my loved wife. (*Raises her up and kisses her.*) Darling, how blind I have been. Thank Heaven, all at last has come right. I do not doubt, nor would I wish to doubt that uncle is blessing us now as he did when we first registered the vows that made us man and wife. In this new land, we will begin life again, supporting and upholding each other with a love that has been tried as with fire and shall never know change here or in the hereafter.

NANCY. Laurence, hardly had you gone, when Daddy said to me "At some future time, my little girl, you will bless your old Dad's memory for this day and the happiness it has made possible for you."

Daddy, if in Heaven you can hear me, hear your little girl now when she declares that your words have come true. (*Gives hand to Laurence.*) We can bless Dad's memory together. (*Curtain falls.*)

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